

# *Inside* Life

Issue 24  
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Does religion cause war?

Seven reasons for believing in God  
Attention—the mind's most valuable resource!

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*Inside Life is a magazine of understanding. Rather than just reporting on life, **Inside Life** seeks to delve inside the marvellous mystery that is life, to discover what it is all about. What does life mean? Where did it come from? How can we make the most of it?*

***Inside Life** provides insight and answers to life's deep questions and challenges, and aims to provide articles of lasting hope, help, and encouragement for successful living in today's fast-moving world.*

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**Our Cover:** It is often claimed that most wars are caused by religion. But is this true or false? Our lead article examines the evidence.

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# Does religion cause war?



By Rex Morgan

One of the most common arguments atheists use to criticise people of faith is that religion is the main cause of wars. If it weren't for religion, they argue, the world would be a much more peaceful place.

For example, the recent brutal series of co-ordinated terrorist attacks in Paris that killed scores of innocent people were motivated by religious zeal, at the hands of the Islamic group ISIS. Similarly, the infamous 11 September 2001 attacks by al-Qaeda on the USA were clearly religious in motivation, part of a *jihad* (holy war) against the infidel Western societies.

Other religious conflicts always seem to be going on in places like the Middle East and Afghanistan. And it is not only Islam and Judaism that are involved in hostilities. Christianity is incriminated, too. It was behind the bloody Crusades in the 11th to 13th

centuries. And the Irish 'Troubles' of the late 20th century were largely a struggle for supremacy between Catholics and Protestants.

Lucretius, a Roman poet of the 1st century BC opined: 'Religion can incite so much evil'.

Sir Elton John stated that religion 'turns people into hateful lemmings', and added: 'I would ban religion completely'.<sup>1</sup>

According to noted atheist Richard Dawkins: 'Only the wilfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today'.<sup>2</sup>

Another leading atheist, Sam Harris, labelled faith and religion as 'the most prolific source of violence in our history', and stated: 'For anyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict'.<sup>3</sup>

## The history of warfare

Let's put this to the test. Is it true that most wars are religiously motivated?

The objective way to settle this question is to consider each of the wars of history and analyse their causes.

The wars of the ancient world, involving the Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, weren't launched out of religious scruples. They were for territorial conquest, to secure trade routes, control borders, and build empires.

The battles of the Middle Ages were generally contests over possession of feudal property, as city states vied for power. The barbarian invasions—the Mongols, Goths, Huns, Vikings and others—were in pursuit of land and livestock, not to impose or defend any gods.

The numerous wars of the 17th–19th centuries between the British, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese colonial powers had very little if any religious component. Most modern wars, including the American, Russian, and French Revolutions; the American Civil War; World Wars I and II; and the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam weren't religious, either.

Human history has also been blighted by horrific mass murders and genocides perpetrated by power-hungry dictators. Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin were each responsible for the deaths of over 40 million people, Adolf Hitler for 20 million, Leopold II of Belgium for 15 million, Vladimir Lenin and Hideki Tojo each for 5 million, Pol Pot for over 2 million—the list goes on and on. But none of these despots were motivated by religion.

Whether or not most wars are caused by religion is something that can be statistically measured. And when the figures are counted, it turns out that, contrary to commonly held opinion, very few wars are religious.



Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod researched the history of warfare for their recently published three-volume work, *The Encyclopedia of Wars*. Covering every major war, rebellion, and revolution from 3500 BC to the present, they listed 1763 wars and found that only 123 of these can be classified as involving a religious cause—less than seven percent of all wars. Of the religious conflicts, they claim that more than half were waged in the name of Islam.

Similarly, a five-volume work published in 2012, *The Encyclopedia of War*, edited by Gordon Martel, concluded that a mere six percent of the wars it listed could be labelled religious wars.

An independent international think-tank, the Institute for Economics and Peace, conducted a comprehensive study of all the wars that took place in 2013. It concluded frankly: 'Religion is not the main cause of conflicts today'. In fact it found that religious elements played no role at all in fourteen (40 percent) of the 35 armed conflicts in 2013. The report stated: 'It is notable that religion did not stand as a single cause in any conflict; however 14% did have religion and the establishment of an Islamic state as driving causes'. The report also noted that having less religion in a country doesn't make it more peaceful. For instance, 'North Korea and Russia, two of the ten least peaceful countries in the world, have two of the three highest levels of atheism in the world'.<sup>4</sup>

### **Some wars are religious**

It is true that a number of wars currently plaguing the planet are religious in nature, notably those instigated by Muslim extremists.

The Muslim holy book, the *Qu'ran*, includes many passages appearing to sanction violence against non-believers. These are hotly debated, however, with Islamic apologists arguing that they relate to defensive warfare or are explained by historical context. Although most followers of Islam claim it to be a peaceful religion,

history does record that the founder of Islam, Muhammed, personally staged several aggressive acts of war in order to extend the reaches of Islam.

In his book, *The Gods of War*, Meic Pearse explains that 'Islam was from the beginning propagated by military conquest, or *jihad*'.<sup>5</sup> He goes on to quote Islam scholars Riddell and Cotterell: 'There can be no doubt that Islam was cradled in violence and that Muhammed himself, through the 26 or 27 raids in which he personally participated, came to serve for some Muslims as a role model for violence'.<sup>6</sup>

Muslim historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldun stated: 'In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and (the obligation to) convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force'.<sup>7</sup>

There is a significant difference between Islam and Christianity, in that while Muslim extremists can find ample encouragement for violence in the words of the *Qu'ran*, Christian extremists can't point to such incitements in the words of Jesus. The Christian scriptures prescribe the pursuing of peace to the extent that even enemies should be loved and prayed for.<sup>8</sup>

Muslim extremists have formed such terror groups as ISIS and al-Qaeda and openly declare that they are waging a religious war to conquer the West and set up an Islamic Caliphate with the aim of global domination.

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq released a statement in which it explained the reasons for its terror campaign: 'We are not fighting to chase out the occupier or to save national unity and keep the borders outlined by the infidels intact...We are fighting because it is a religious duty to do it, just as it is a duty to take the Sharia (Islamic law) to the government and create an Islamic state'.<sup>9</sup>

But though it is evident that some wars have been caused by religion, the vast majority have not.

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After cataloguing a series of the bloodiest wars of history, Meic Pearse concludes that 'most wars...owed little or nothing to religious causation'.<sup>10</sup> 'In sum, only a small proportion of the deadliest conflicts in human history can be traced principally to religious causation'.<sup>11</sup>

'Lives lost during religious conflicts pale in comparison to those experienced during the regimes who wanted nothing to do with the idea of God', sums up Robin Schumacher, in an article entitled *Does Religion Cause War?*<sup>12</sup>

Harking back to the 'old days' before Google came along, I have just pulled out my dusty old 1980 edition of the *World Book Encyclopaedia* and note that the three-page article on 'War', analysing the causes, history, and methods of warfare, doesn't make even *one* reference to religion or religious war.

The evidence is in. A study of the wars of history clearly shows that most wars aren't caused by religion. So if religion doesn't cause war, what does?

### **A multiplicity of causes**

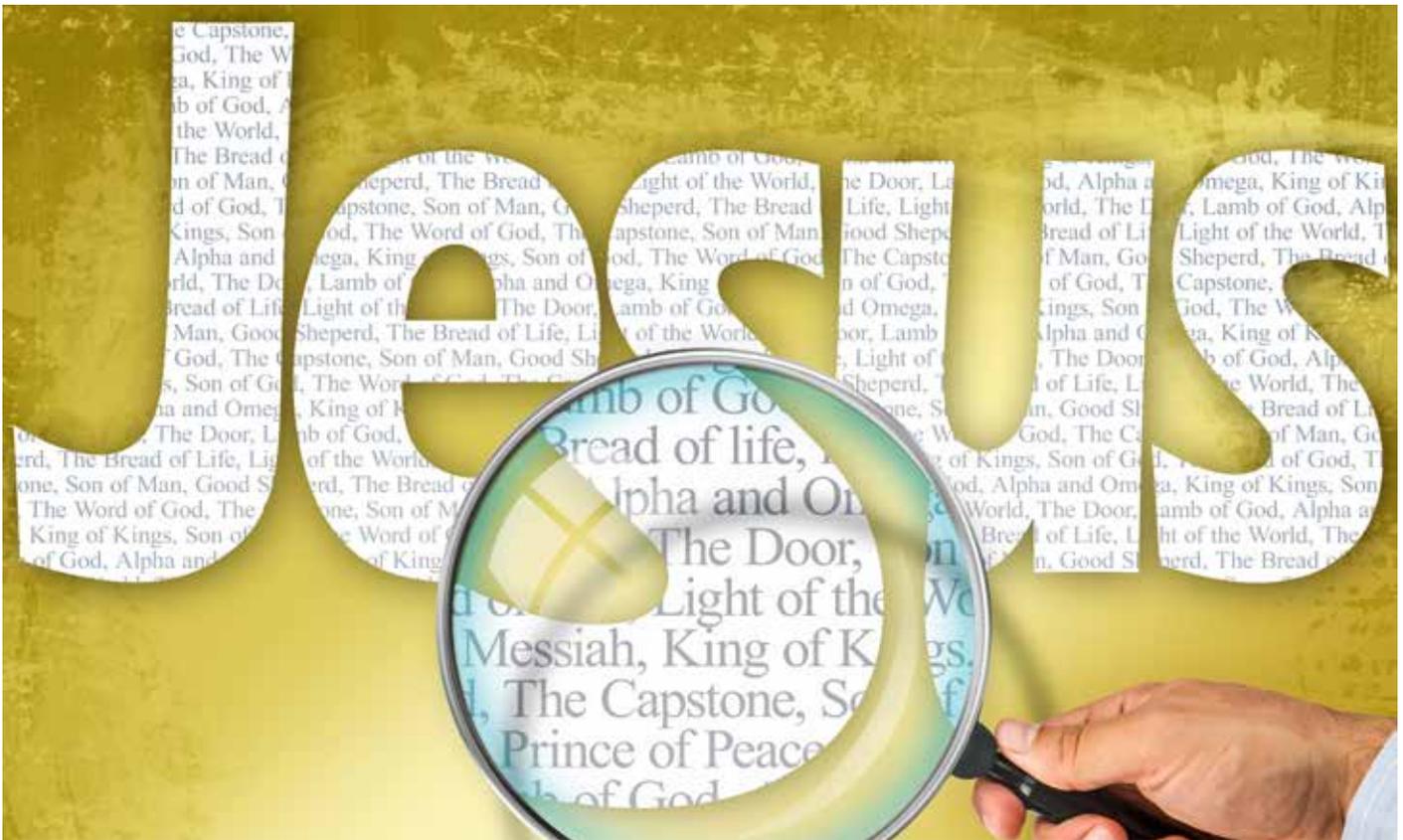
The causes of war are many and varied, with religious, political, and

economic factors often intertwined in a way that makes it impossible to attribute any war to just one cause.

In *The Encyclopedia of Wars*, Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod wrote: 'Wars have always arisen, and arise today, from territorial disputes, military rivalries, conflicts of ethnicity and strivings for commercial and economic advantage, and they have always depended on and depend on today, pride, prejudice, coercion, envy, cupidity, competitiveness, and a sense of injustice'.<sup>13</sup>

In *Probing War and Warfare*, author J A Kahn also puts a finger on some of the causes of war: 'The fighting starts when a nation wants something so badly that it is willing to go to war to get it. Sometimes war results from a disagreement between two nations, and sometimes from a desire for conquest. Some basic causes may be a desire for more land, a desire for more wealth, a desire for more power, or a desire for security'.<sup>14</sup>

In the Introduction to his book surveying the conflicts of history, Meic Pearse succinctly sums up his findings: 'The two principal causes of human warfare are in fact culture and greed for territory, resources, or power. Since culture and greed often



clothe themselves in religion, wars fought for culture often appear to be fought for religion'.<sup>15</sup>

So we find that, as Meic Pearse puts it: 'Many wars in which religion seems to be the cause of the problem turn out, on closer inspection, to be more ambiguous in their origins. For religion was and is often used as a morally convenient cloak for nationalism, human greed or other mundane motives'.<sup>16</sup>

For instance, it is recognised by historians that the Northern Ireland conflict (the 'Troubles') was not a religious war. One historian notes: 'Although the Troubles in Northern Ireland are often portrayed as a religious conflict of a Catholic vs a Protestant faction, the more fundamental cause of the conflict was in fact ethnic or nationalistic rather than religious in nature. Since the native Irish were mostly Catholic and the later British-sponsored immigrants were mainly Protestant, the terms become shorthand for the two cultures, but it is inaccurate to describe the conflict as a religious one'.<sup>17</sup>

Another commentator writes: 'It should, I think, be apparent that the Northern Irish conflict is not a

religious conflict...Although religion has a place—and indeed an important one—in the repertoire of conflict in Northern Ireland, the majority of participants see the situation as primarily concerned with matters of politics and nationalism, not religion. And there is no reason to disagree with them'.<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly, the question of the causes behind war was raised in the Bible, where a writer asked 2000 years ago: 'What causes fights and quarrels among you?' He went on to give the answer: 'Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight'.<sup>19</sup>

It's hard to argue with this analysis. It is remarkable how often the Bible hits problems right on the head, with incisive statements written thousands of years ago about many of mankind's chronic difficulties.

How sad it is that there have been so many wars in the course of history! The Swiss historian Jean Jacques Babel estimated that the 5500 years or so of recorded history have seen a meagre total of just 292 years of peace. The

*World Book* article on 'War' points out a sad conundrum: 'Most people hate war, yet for hundreds of years war has been going on somewhere in the world nearly all the time. Earthquakes and floods *happen* to people, but people *make* war themselves'.<sup>20</sup>

### The solution emerges

Try as we might, mankind seems unable to find the solution to war. 'The war to end all wars', a term used in connection with World War I, certainly hasn't yet occurred!

As a biblical writer put it, referring to society almost 3000 years ago: 'The way of peace they do not know'.<sup>21</sup> So what can be done to bring an end to the scourge of war?

Here the Bible comes to the fore again. It is unique in that it purports to be a revelation from God to mankind. As such, it should be able to point mankind in the right direction morally. And it doesn't fail in this respect. As well as illuminating the root cause of war, it clearly reveals the solution.

As he walked the dusty streets of Palestine, Jesus got to the core of the problem when he stated: 'For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder,

adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander'.<sup>22</sup> War proceeds from greed, and greed comes from our 'heart', referring to the thoughts and motivations deep inside us.

In other words, wars are caused by human nature. Even young children are motivated by an innate sense of competition and selfishness to fight each other for toys, and every young child is like this! All human beings tend much of the time to think of themselves first—it is just part of being human. As young children grow into adults, they retain this inherent self-centredness, but begin to use increasingly more sophisticated methods of getting their way, so the skirmishes of children develop into the full-blown warfare of adults and sadly, grow to involve entire nations.

The only way to end warfare, then, is to have a change in our hearts, a change in our human nature. But how is that possible?

Here the message of Jesus (by the way the Bible calls him 'the Prince of Peace') becomes sharply relevant. He came to show mankind that if we believe and put our trust in him, he will change us from the inside out, by living inside us, and bringing his values of love, kindness, mercy, and forgiveness into the core of our beings.

Christians follow Jesus, who clearly urged his disciples to renounce the natural inclination to competitive striving and instead seek after peace and love. He gave instructions such as 'love one another', 'overcome evil with good', 'always try to be kind to each other and to everyone', and 'I tell you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you'.<sup>23</sup>

So it turns out that far from being the cause of war, in fact Christianity is the only answer to war—it provides the definitive solution to war!

Isn't it ironic then that wars have been waged in the very name of the loving God who wants, and shows us, the way to peace? But it is not fair to judge Christianity on the behaviour of

some of the misguided humans who say they follow it. Many professing Christians have acted totally contrary to what they claim to believe! Failing to internalise the principles of Jesus in their hearts, their actions show that they are not true followers of Christ.

On the other hand, countless good people have truly followed Jesus, actively living and sharing a life of gentleness, kindness, honesty, and love, making the world a better place for all around them. Multiple thousands of innocent Christians have been persecuted and have even died for their faith, and have responded to hatred in the same way that Jesus did, asking: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing'.<sup>24</sup>

So we have surveyed the evidence and seen that religion isn't the cause of wars, but indeed the very opposite. In fact, true religion will bring about the end of war, once and for all. The only cure for war is the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. At this time he is actively present in his people, guiding them in the way of peace. It isn't yet the time for him to act on a national or international scale to bring about the end to war. But that time is coming in the future. Jesus has promised to return to the earth, to establish peace for all mankind.

The Bible foretells this time in beautiful words: 'He will judge between the nations, and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore'.<sup>25</sup>

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> 'When Elton met Jake', *The Observer*, Sunday November 16, 2006.
- <sup>2</sup> [ffrf.org/timely/dawkins.php](http://ffrf.org/timely/dawkins.php).
- <sup>3</sup> Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2005), pp. 236–7.
- <sup>4</sup> *Five Key Questions Answered on the Link between Peace and Religion*, [www.economicsandpeace.org](http://www.economicsandpeace.org)
- <sup>5</sup> Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War*, IVP, 2007, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Peter G Riddell and Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Context* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2003) p. 212.

<sup>7</sup> <http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/ibn-khaldun-on-holy-war-as-religious-duty>.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 6:27–36.

<sup>9</sup> *Iraq: We are Fighting for an Islamic State, Says Al-Qaeda in Iraq*, [adnki.com](http://adnki.com), 18 October 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War*, IVP, 2007, p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War*, IVP, 2007, p. 56

<sup>12</sup> <https://carm.org/religion-cause-war>.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod, *Encyclopedia of Wars*, Facts on File, 2005, p. xxii

<sup>14</sup> J.S. Kahn, *Probing War and Warfare*, APH Publishing, 2005, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War*, IVP, 2007, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War*, IVP, 2007, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> McGarry J, O'Leary B, 1995. *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images*. Oxford, Blackwell.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Jenkins (1997). *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*. SAGE Publications. p. 120.

<sup>19</sup> James 4:1-2, all scriptural references from *the New International Version*.

<sup>20</sup> *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1980, vol. 21, p. 21

<sup>21</sup> Isaiah 59:8.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 15:19.

<sup>23</sup> John 13:34; Romans 12:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; Luke 6:27.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 23:34.

<sup>25</sup> Isaiah 2:4.



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and office administration for over 30 years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications. Rex can be contacted at [rex@gci.org.nz](mailto:rex@gci.org.nz)

# One day it will be redundant!

By Cliff Neill

**M**ikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov died on 23 December 2013, aged 94. His name is a byword all around the planet, especially where there is war and conflict because, as you know, he invented the cheapest, simplest, and most reliable rifle in the world, the Kalashnikov! It is commonly known as the AK-47: 'AK' for *Automat Kalashnikova*, '47' for 1947—the year it was invented by this Russian general.

Some time ago, I read an article written by a newspaper reporter called Robert Fisk who met Kalashnikov at an arms fair in Abu Dhabi 12 years ago. Apparently he asked him some pointed questions about all the carnage, death, and destruction that his weapon had brought about over the years but, of course, the replies to his questions sought to justify the rifle

and blame the policies of governments worldwide.

Perhaps this elderly soldier had come to terms with his invention. He actually made this statement to the reporter: 'You see, all these feelings come about because one side wants to liberate itself with

God say to him when he died?'

His reply: 'We were educated in such a way that I am probably an atheist, but something exists...'.<sup>2</sup>

I think that this elderly gentleman who had given most of his life to war and the manufacture of his famous, or infamous, rifle was pondering the future and perhaps seeing a glimmer of truth. I sincerely hope so.

Yes, he was right: 'Something exists!' And that great Being informs us that sometime in the future whenever he comes to dwell with us mortals: 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more'.<sup>3</sup>

arms. But in my opinion, it is good that prevails. It will be after I am dead, but the time will come when my weapons will be no more used or necessary'.

Or as General Kalashnikov put it: 'The time will come when my weapons will be no more used or necessary'.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 2:4.

<sup>2</sup> [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/is-mikhail-kalashnikov-in-hell-the-man-was-confident-he-would-not-go-there-9025337.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/is-mikhail-kalashnikov-in-hell-the-man-was-confident-he-would-not-go-there-9025337.html) .

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 21:4.

This is quite prophetic because the Bible predicts a time when 'they shall beat their swords (Kalashnikovs) into ploughshares'.<sup>1</sup>

General Kalashnikov was also asked: But what about God? What would

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# ATTENTION—the mind's most valuable resource!

By Richard Fowler

**W**e live in a world of sensory overload! Our attention is competed for minute by minute. Whether it is that slightly annoying YouTube advert we have all become used to or that familiar 'ping' on your phone alerting you to another message.

In fact, by the end of this day instant messaging services would have globally sent 50 billion messages. In an age of technology and advertisements our attention comes at a premium.

And even this article is asking for your mind's most valuable resource—attention. Yet you may never have considered the effect of attention on your life. After all what possibly could it change? Well, actually more than you think!

Let me explain.

You were once a newly born bouncing baby who underwent quite a special process. By the time you were eight months old the connections that linked your brain cells, called neurons, had reached their most numerous and dense—at no other time in your life will you have as many connections as you did then. So what happened to them?

Well, ever since then those connections that were stimulated and used through interaction and stimulation by the environment—being touched, looked at, talked to, played with—were strengthened and kept. But on the other hand, those connections that were not stimulated were lost or pruned—the brain

decided that they were no longer needed. What that meant was that your brain developed functions and brain cell networks best suited to the environment you grew up in. Your brain was shaped by where its attention was directed!

Now before you start blaming Mum and Dad because you might not be able to dance like Justin Timberlake or play the piano like Chopin, the story doesn't end there. Because your brain continues to be shaped throughout life. It's called Neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to be shaped by what you pay attention to.

This is true of our good friend Einstein, whose parietal lobes—which are integral for mathematical, visual, and spatial cognition—were 15% wider than normal parietal lobes. And something similar is also true of our London cabbies: their efforts to learn 320 routes which cover a mind-boggling 25,000 streets and 20,000

landmarks and places of interest has meant their hippocampus is sizably bigger than most people's.

It's kind of like what Buddha said once, 'We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think'.

In fact I had my very own experience once that demonstrated how influential attention can be, which led to a slightly embarrassing event to say the least. Many years ago I was watching that good old Australian TV series that was the home-time comfort for so many of us, 'Neighbours'. The scene that I was about to witness had been developing over some episodes but finally came the time that this girl was going to say to a certain boy these most powerful words: 'I love you!' I was on the edge of my seat. I had seen this moment coming for so long and now the time had come...and then, my home phone rang! Suddenly I was torn between the urgency of picking up the phone (my parents had always told me to answer, just in case



it was an emergency) and this most captivating scene. I held off answering the phone long enough—the words were on the tip of her tongue, she was about to say it! I got to the phone. I could not hold off any longer. I picked up the phone. And then I said something that mortified me: ‘I love you!’ For a moment I could not quite believe what I had just said. The word ‘hello’ had seemed to escape me, and because I had so much attention on this intense scene, I came out with the very words the girl was about to say to this boy. Who was on the other end of the phone? My brother! You can imagine it was an embarrassing conversation from then on.

You’ve heard the saying ‘monkey see, monkey do’, well there is a neurological truth in this.

Studies have found that a system in your brain contains mirror neurons or brain cells which fire up both when we perform an action and when we observe it. Dr Daniel Glaser of UCL’s Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience says: ‘When we watch a sport, our brain performs an internal simulation of the actions, as if it were sending the same movement instructions to our own body’.

Now that’s pretty cool and may explain why as children (and sometimes as

adults) after watching a martial arts or dance film, we will make space in our bedroom and have a go ourselves — often with disastrous consequences!

But what does this mean for you and for me? *That we should pay attention to what we are paying attention to!*

Attention shapes our brain and therefore influences our thinking. The mind is something we should protect, nurture, and look after—your mind needs feeding with the right ‘food’. Which means letting things into your brain that inspire you.

On the other hand, limit the consumption of bad news and limit time around negative people—they will only suck you into their negativity. Consider the programmes, videos, and movies you watch. Is pornography or illicit sexual material going to help you think positive thoughts towards the opposite sex? Have you watched so much bad news that you have become immune to feeling compassion?

Let’s seek out things that are good and positive. Spend time around people who do good things, people with the qualities you would like to possess. Read books about people who have done amazing things. And ask yourself this question: is what I’m watching or paying attention to what I

would like to become? If the answer is no, then maybe you should consider paying attention to something else. What you pay attention to really does matter.

A final request for your cognitive attention...

In recent research on compassion researchers found that seeing someone give away money activated neurons in the brain which make us happy. A brain-imaging study headed by neuroscientist Jordan Grafman from the National Institute of Health showed that the ‘pleasure centres’ in the brain, the parts of our brains that are active when we experience pleasure (like dessert, money, sex), are equally active when we observe someone giving money to charity as when we receive money ourselves!

So where does all this leave us? It makes me think of a Bible verse I heard once in church. It is taken from a letter of the apostle Paul: ‘Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things’ (Philippians 4:8).

*This article was first published in the October 2015 issue of Because magazine. For more information go to [www.because.uk.com](http://www.because.uk.com).*



# The write note

By Aubrey Warren

**M**y wife and I recently sold our family home. After 22 years it was quite a task to pack. One of the things we discovered was the mountain of cards, letters, and notes we'd accumulated over the years.

Not that we hoarded such things, but there were a lot we just hadn't been able to throw out. And even having ruthlessly culled, there remains quite a collection of cards and handwritten notes we still just can't part with.

Strange that in a world where the average person gets more than 100 emails, text messages, and social media updates every day, we would treasure old-fashioned handwritten cards and notes. Or perhaps not.

It turns out that handwritten notes connect in quite powerful ways. And that makes them a simple but high-impact way of expressing appreciation, providing positive reinforcement, and recognising contributions and achievement.

Renowned as one of the toughest bosses in the world while at General Electric, Jack Welch was famous for his handwritten notes of appreciation.

Those notes reinforced his, and the company's, commitment to developing people. Doug Conant, CEO of the Campbell Soup Company, writes ten to twenty personal notes a day expressing appreciation, acknowledging achievements, welcoming new hires. And those notes, like Jack Welch's, get shared with colleagues, family, and friends—extending their impact and reinforcing a culture.

Understanding the personal impact written notes can have, the CEO of PepsiCo, Indra Nooyi, writes personal notes to the families of employees, celebrating achievements and acknowledging the families' contribution to the employee's work. She even sometimes writes letters to the parents of executives. (*Forbes* magazine ranked her the tenth most powerful woman in the world in 2013.)

In our often de-personalised working environments, the positive impact of a word or note of recognition, appreciation, or encouragement can have a huge impact on energy and commitment.

There's nothing magical about a handwritten note, of course—it's what the note communicates. Mary Kay Ash, the founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics, said: 'There are two things people want more than sex

and money—they want praise and recognition'.

In *Why Should Anyone Be Led By You?* Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones write about the need people have to feel their work is significant: 'In simple terms, they need recognition for their contribution. Social scientists have made repeated pronouncements on [the] profound human need for recognition. So it is remarkable how often as individuals we seem to want it but not give it'.

Social scientist Randy Garner conducted some experiments to assess the impact of handwritten notes versus typical covering letters on responses to requests. 'Garner found that placing a personalised sticky note on the survey did more than simply persuade more people to respond to the survey: those who filled out the survey with the handwritten sticky-note message returned it more promptly and gave more detailed and attentive answers to the questions. And when the researcher made the note even more personal in nature by adding his initials and "Thank You!" to the handwritten message, the response shot up even higher'.

Personalised notes can even persuade dissatisfied customers to stick with you. Dan Hesse, CEO of Sprint (a telecommunications

company in the US), told *Forbes* magazine in 2012 about one of the customer satisfaction strategies his company used in moving from being the lowest rated to the most improved across a five-year period: 'We have a voluntary program which is really going old school, that we call "Thank You Thursdays". On Thursdays we gather in rooms, generally cafeterias in our offices across the country. Employees get together and we write handwritten thank you cards to our customers. It's amazing the impact that it's had on customers because not too many people get handwritten notes anymore'.

Handwritten or not, do you remember your reaction when you last received a personal note of appreciation? Have you noticed the reaction of someone who's received a card or other note of appreciation? Do you keep a secret stash of letters, cards, or even sticky notes with words of recognition or appreciation? There is every chance that you do.

The value of a handwritten note is such that, in our digital-everything age, there are now even, yes, apps for sending 'handwritten' notes to people. That just seems wrong somehow, but it reinforces how much we value personalised approaches to communication.

As I write this my eye catches an ancient yellow sticky note shaped a bit like a star (maybe that's why I kept it). The nine words on the star were written by someone in a workshop many years ago. Somehow I just haven't been able to throw that little star note away and it remains posted on a wall. It's not the note (or the handwriting), it's what the note communicates, what it reminds me of, and how it continues to make me feel.

Personalised recognition and appreciation is not soft, silly, or superficial. It is often deeply meaningful to those who receive such notes. And they can be hard to write until you make them part of your

way of doing things (not only like the CEOs above, but also the head of a middle school, the public service manager, the small business owner, and the parent who immediately come to mind).

Restoring a touch of personalisation to our too-often de-personalised working environments can be simple, powerful, and humanising. It's about communicating a sense of respect, care, and appreciation. It's about sustaining the connections that create energy.

Maybe an occasional personalised message—even if it's just on a Post-It® note—will provide the 'write note' for someone you know.

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# Seven reasons for believing in God



By Roy Lawrence

**B**ack in 2005, I had what theologians call a 'Dark Night of the Soul' experience. It was horrible. My faith deserted me and I found myself in a state of complete and utter spiritual darkness.

For a while not only could I not believe in God—but the very idea of God ceased to have any meaning for me.

My whole life in the ministry seemed at that time to be a delusion and a deception. It was agonising.

Mercifully this time did come to an end, however, and I found I was able to grope my way out of the darkness and rediscover a capacity for faith. In fact this re-discovered faith is stronger than ever. I now find unbelief quite impossible. So many totally compelling reasons for belief have now come to me, and I would like to share some of them with you.

## 1. Creation implies a creator

The basic and indisputable fact of life is that 'stuff exists'. I exist, you exist, the universe exists. It seems plain common sense that it all has to come from somewhere. Five hundred years before Jesus the Greek philosopher Parmenides said: 'Nothing comes from nothing'. It is a principle which has been acknowledged ever since then. Even those who believe that creation can be explained if you think that everything has evolved from

primordial slime, are still left with the question: 'Where did the primordial slime itself come from?'

## 2. Design implies a designer

The fact that stuff exists is only a starting point. For we can not only say that 'stuff exists', but that the stuff which exists is totally amazing in its design. Whether we look upwards through a telescope or downwards through a microscope, whether we consider the orbits of planets or the symmetry of snowflakes, there is evidence of regularity and order. There are discernable patterns both in the mega-mystery of galaxies and in the micro-mysteries of atoms.

What does this say to us in terms of common sense? If I were to find a pile of junk by the side of the road—a couple of rusty tin cans, a few feathers, a crumpled bit of old newspaper, some fallen leaves—it would be reasonable to assume they had just been blown together by chance, wouldn't it? However, if I were to find a watch in the gutter, or a camera, or a mobile phone, I would certainly never say: 'A watch, or a camera, or a mobile phone has happened here by chance'. I would assume they belonged to someone. Somebody would have had to make them and someone would own them.

It's a matter of indisputable fact that the universe has much more in common with the watch, the camera, and the mobile phone than with the pile of junk. In the words of Sir Fred Hoyle: 'To claim that the universe resulted by accident is like saying that an explosion in a junk yard could result in a Jumbo Jet ready to fly. The universe is a put-up job'.<sup>1</sup>

## 3. Artistry implies an artist

Again we are still only at the starting point as we consider the evidence around us for the existence of God. For the universe not only shows us order and design, it also shows us artistry of the highest nature. I am privileged to live near the sea. I can look out from my house in one direction and see the glory of the



amazing sunsets which we have in our part of the world, or in another direction I can see the beauty of the roses in our garden. Can such artistry possibly be accidental?

If we were to put a million monkeys to type on a million word processors, what chance is there that one of them would just happen to type out a Shakespearean play entirely by accident? Virtually none at all. Artistry implies an artist. I would believe in Shakespeare even if there were no

evidence of his life, simply because I have his works in all their artistic glory.

## 4. Moral law implies a lawgiver

Without law we would be in deep trouble. For instance there would be chaos on the roads if we were to drive on the left or right entirely according to our own whims and fancies. The laws which hold society together have to come from somewhere. Small-scale laws like the rules of the road can come from our own legislators, but

there are larger laws which we can neither determine nor change.

These unchanging principles of life are sometimes called 'moral law'. They are concerned with the difference between right and wrong, the difference between good and evil. We cannot determine them. We can only discover them. They in no way depend upon our own whims and fancies or the variable practices of this or that society.

Legislators have no power to change them. Any law in any society will be perverted and wrong if it ignores these principles of life. History is full of examples: the massacre of the innocents by King Herod, the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis, the violation of human rights by corrupt governments today may be legal by their own twisted standards but are not, and could never be, right. They offend a moral law which is greater than they are. I know of no way to account for this moral law other than by the existence of a Supreme Lawgiver.

## 5. The miracle of you and me

So far we have cast a wide net, stretching our minds to consider the implications of the universe, but in truth we hardly need to do so in order to find a reason to believe in God. We need to look no further than ourselves.

Some time ago there was a TV advert showing a car assembly line where all the work was done by a series of robotic arms. We found ourselves marvelling at whoever had invented such a mechanical miracle. Yet those mechanical arms were crude compared with your arms and mine. Look for a moment at your own hand. It is an amazing mechanism: delicate, complex, multi-functional, wonderful in every way.

Even the smallest part of your hand could hardly have come into being by accident. Sir Isaac Newton said: 'In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence!'

## 6. Religious experience

If our bodies testify to God's existence, how much more so do our minds and how much more does that mysterious core of our being which we sometimes call 'the spirit'?

Throughout history men and women have reported that their inner life has included experiences which are religious or mystical in their nature. They still do. I feel immensely privileged on the occasions when people tell me of such things.

Back in the 1980s, Oxford psychologist Basil Douglas-Smith collected dozens of these experiences and has published them in a little book entitled *The Mystics Come to Harley Street*.<sup>2</sup> He has no doubt about the validity and reality of these experiences. He believes that in themselves they justify religious belief. He recognises the importance of the fact that, whilst most of us have to make an act of faith to believe in God, there are surprisingly many who would say that they actually 'know' of God's existence because they have experienced him. He stresses that such people are not in any way deranged and quotes this little poem:

*Don't prattle of religious mania.  
They're saner than you all—and brainier!*

## 7. Jesus

Writing this article has stretched me—and reading it may have stretched you. Life is a mysterious process, simultaneously beautiful, bewildering, and sometimes painful. Fathoming its origins and its purpose is no easy matter. I know there are difficulties in believing in God, but there are many

more difficulties in atheism. We need help. We need guidance.

I am particularly fortunate, because I was privileged to spend four years at Oxford and then two further years at Cambridge, studying both Classics and Theology. In doing so I was able to consider the thoughts of some of the greatest minds in the ancient world: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and many more. At the end of this time, however, my firm conclusion was that the greatest wisdom I had encountered was to be found in Jesus.

Even when I was struggling with my own 'dark night of the soul', I never ceased to find Jesus crucially important. In the last resort, although all the reasons for belief which I have shared with you are strong ones, above all I take God the Father on trust from Jesus. To Jesus, God the Father was as real as the air he breathed. God the Father was the core of his being.

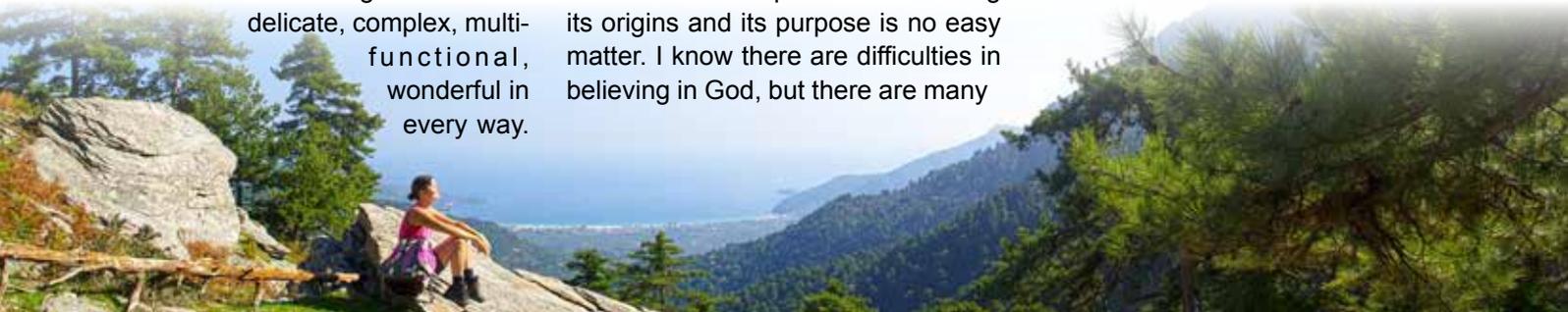
Atheists have to say: 'I am wiser than Jesus'. Personally I could never say that, and I would never want to do so.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sir Fred Hoyle (1915 — 2001) is renowned as one of the twentieth century's great scientific thinkers, who was not afraid to question orthodox beliefs.

<sup>2</sup> Basil Douglas-Smith, *The Mystics Come to Harley Street*, Regency Press (London & New York) Limited, 1984. ISBN 13: 978-0721206080.

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# The Mona Lisa and the universe



By Ian Woodley

**T**he portrait of Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci has produced much speculation over the years. Who is this lady with the enigmatic smile? Why did Da Vinci paint her? What is the scene in the background referring to?

Various explanations have been provided to try and solve these questions, but definitive proof may well be lost in history. Yet this does not harm my enjoyment of the image. Da Vinci was clearly a master of his craft.

Meanwhile, science can now give us answers to very different queries. What pigments did Da Vinci use? Did he start off with an outline drawing underneath the portrait? Various clever techniques can be applied to give certainty on these matters. Yet when I stand back and view the painting, this knowledge doesn't add to—or take away from—my admiration of the portrait.

Why my fascination with the Mona Lisa? Well, the Mona Lisa has helped me to re-visit a thorny theological question: Why is it that science and faith appear to disagree? Our love of beautiful works of art point us towards a straight-forward answer: They don't disagree at all—because they investigate very different questions.

When I admire the Mona Lisa, I see something of the artist in that portrait. I see Da Vinci's mastery of the art form, his passion for the subject, and

his genius in bringing the whole image together. I see the intangible presence of the artist. And even if I could answer all of those questions on the materials, paint, history, and the subject herself, I still wouldn't be anywhere near re-producing the image we now know as the Mona Lisa.

The universe is the same. Scientists can use Einstein's equations and all of quantum theory to give us wonderful knowledge of what makes the universe tick. They can also plot the timeline from the universe's early beginnings to the modern day. But none of this explains why we are here.

Faith gives us eyes to see God's passion for bringing everything into being, showing us the intangible presence of the divine artist. The Bible seeks to capture that divine presence, to show how the creation reflects our Creator's personality. God is shown to be intimately sculpting the Earth, speaking his innermost desires for creation into existence.

The Bible does not refer to molecules, gravity, or subatomic particles. In fact the Bible appears to ignore the questions of modern science altogether. Instead we are directed to see the big picture of the beauty and order of all things and how God has stamped his personality onto the universe.

If I went on a tour of the National Portrait Gallery in London and was only given a list of the molecules that produce the various colours on

view—well, I would be disappointed. And I say that as someone who studied physics and chemistry at university! By all means tell me some of the clever techniques used by the artist. But above all let me stand back and soak in the mastery of the artwork. The Bible tells us that God 'stood back' from the creation and 'soaked in' all he had done: 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good' (Genesis 1:31). The great Artist felt satisfaction from all he had created.

Science gets us 'under the bonnet' of the universe and shows us the clever techniques God used to bring everything into existence. Faith draws our attention back to the artist, to his character and purpose. A study of the universe is like studying the Mona Lisa: we find that art, history, and science are separate fields of exploration, producing very different answers. Faith doesn't seek to contradict physics, chemistry, or history. Instead faith seeks to add to them. Faith gives us a bigger picture of the world, enabling us to see—and admire—the greatest Grand Master of all art forms.

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